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# Spring HOME & GARDEN

2023



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# Popular trends in home exteriors

Certain homes have an undeniable wow factor. That instant appeal tends to be noticeable the moment visitors pull up to the curb, and it might be a byproduct of homeowners' willingness to embrace the latest exterior design trends.

Trends come and go, but recognition of the current fashions can help homeowners create that highly sought-after wow factor. The following are some recent trends in home exteriors that have helped homeowners set their properties apart.

## Wood

Natural wood has undeniable appeal, and it hasn't only found new-found devotion among home interior decorators. Natural wood garage doors create a sense of warmth and can set a home apart from others with steel doors, which tend to be the most popular garage door material. In addition to the garage door, natural wood entry doors and wood decks are popular ways to impart this classical, warm look to a home's exterior.

## Painted brick

Like natural wood, brick is a traditional material that's both sturdy and classical. But homeowners can add character to brick with a coat of paint, which has become a popular trend in recent years. Light tones tend to be most popular when painting bricks. The experts at Better Homes & Gardens note that this could prove a long-term commitment if homeowners so desire, as a properly painted brick exterior could last as long as 20 years.

## Hardscaping

Hardscaping isn't a new trend, but it has been trending in recent years. Hardscaping is an umbrella term that includes everything from outdoor living rooms to incorporating natural stone into a



landscape. Outdoor living rooms are one hardscaping trend that has become increasingly popular of late. These spaces serve as an extension of indoor living spaces. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that recently homeowners have looked to create covered outdoor rooms that can be enjoyed more frequently than patios or decks that are not protected from the elements.

## Outdoor lighting

It makes sense that individuals looking to spend more time enjoying

their properties outdoors would want more lighting outside. Ambient outdoor lighting can be utilized throughout a property. Such lighting can light up walkways and driveways and be used to light up landscaping features like trees and gardens.

Home design trends tend to be fickle. But recognition of the current trends in exterior home design can set homes apart and turn properties into awe-inspiring places to enjoy the great outdoors.



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# Signs a home exterior needs updating

Renovations are a great way for homeowners to reshape their homes. Some may aspire to renovate so their home is more reflective of their personal taste, while others may do so in an effort to make their homes better align with modern styles and sensibilities. Regardless of why a homeowner chooses to renovate, the need to do so is often evident to the

naked eye, especially when the time comes to update home exteriors.

Curb appeal is often discussed in regard to the effects it can have when selling a home. But curb appeal is equally important for homeowners who aren't putting their homes on the market. A well-maintained, aesthetically appealing home is a source

of pride, while a home with fading curb appeal can make homeowners feel a little sheepish. Homeowners who want their homes to maintain their curb appeal can look for signs that it's time to update their home exteriors.

· **Curling shingles:** The roof may not be the first thing people think of when pondering curb appeal, but a damaged roof can contribute to problems that ultimately affect the exterior and interior of the home. Multiple curling shingles indicate it's time to replace the roof. The sight of curling shingles is not pretty, but the larger issue in such instances is the potential for costly water damage when water gets in through the affected shingles.

· **Dated entry door:** Many home improvement experts insist they can determine when a home was built or most recently renovated simply by looking at the front door. Steel and glass doors are popular in modern homes, so homeowners with front doors with ornate designs and oval glass inserts can likely benefit from an upgrade to their entryway. A modern front door can make a statement and real estate experts note how popular updated front doors are among buyers.

· **Unightly landscaping:** It's not only the physical components of the home that may suggest an update is necessary. Homeowners without a green thumb may have exterior landscaping that has seen better days. If a spring or summer day spent tending to your landscaping is not your ideal weekend pastime, then consider replacing unsightly landscaping with low-maintenance plants or hardscaping. These alternatives to more needy plants can create curb appeal without requiring any extra work for homeowners.

· **Cracked driveways/walkways:** If the driveway looks like a busy road at the end of snow plowing season, chances are that's adversely affecting the impression people have of your home. In addition, cracked walkways indicate a need for renovations, as these areas are front and center when welcoming guests.

Updating a home's exterior can restore curb appeal and help homeowners feel better about their properties.



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# WHITEHALL TURF EQUIPMENT

## Go Green In Your Lawn and Garden This Spring

- **Create a compost pile.** Composting is an eco-friendly way to enrich lawns and gardens. Composting helps to conserve water because compost promotes moisture retention in soil, reducing homeowners' need to water their lawns and gardens while also helping them to save money on their water bills. Composting also helps homeowners avoid the need to use potentially harmful chemical fertilizers because compost is a natural, slow release fertilizer.
- **Water at the right times of day.** Homeowners who water their lawns and gardens at the right time of day can help the planet and reduce their energy bills. Watering during the coolest times of the day means less water will be lost to evaporation, ensuring water-needy soil will get all it needs to help lawns and gardens thrive. Early morning watering before the sun reaches its midday peak and/or evening watering as the sun is setting are typically great times to water lawns and gardens, rather than when temperatures are at their hottest.
- **Use a rain barrel.** Rain barrels provide another great way to conserve water while tending to lawns and gardens. Rain barrels collect and store rain water from roofs and downspouts, keeping water from washing into sewage systems where it can't be put to good use. Water collected in rain barrels can be used in various ways. Many homeowners can use water from rain barrels to water their lawns, gardens and houseplants, saving money on their water bills along the way.

## The basics of fertilizing a lawn

Spring marks the return of lawn and garden season. Lawns often bear the brunt of winter's wrath, so spring is a great time to nurse them back to health, and fertilizing can be an essential component of that process.

Fertilizing a lawn can be intimidating. An array of fertilizers, with each seemingly designed to address a different issue, can make homeowners' heads spin when visiting their local lawn and garden center. However, fertilizing is a very simple task that any homeowner can tackle. In fact, fears about fertilizing are often unfounded and can be overcome with some basic knowledge of the process.

Identify which type of grass is in the yard. The home improvement experts at HGTV note that turfgrass is divided into two categories: cool-season grass and warm-season grass. A local lawn and garden center can



help homeowners identify which type of grass is in the yard, and this often depends on location. Fescue, bluegrass and perennial ryegrass are some examples of cool-season grasses, while Bermuda, bahia, St. Augustine, and zoysia are considered warm-season grasses. Identifying which type of grass is in the lawn is important because that will indicate when to fertilize. Cool-season grasses are typically best fertilized in early spring, while warm-season lawns can benefit from an application just

before especially warm temperatures arrive.

Survey the lawn to identify which spreader to use. A small yard or a thriving lawn with only a few bald or unsightly patches may not need a full application of fertilizer. In such instances, a hand spreader can suffice. For larger lawns and areas, a broadcast spreader is the ideal option. Spreaders have multiple settings, and the fertilizer package will indicate which setting to utilize when using the product.

Test the soil prior to purchasing fertilizer. The lawn experts at Pennington® note that a simple soil test can reveal soil pH and phosphorous and potassium levels. Soil tests can be purchased at most home improvement stores and lawn and garden centers, and they can help homeowners determine which fertilizer will most benefit their lawns.

Water the lawn prior to fertilizing. The experts at Scotts® recommend a good watering a few days prior to fertilizing a lawn. Such an approach ensures the soil is ready to accept the fertilizer once it's applied.

Follow the instructions carefully. Detailed instructions are typically provided on fertilizer product packaging. Once homeowners have identified and purchased the product they need, they can simply follow the instructions on the packaging, including how and when to water after application, which can make fertilizing less intimidating.

Fertilizing in spring can help a lawn recover from the previous summer and winter, ensuring it's lush and green when summer entertaining season arrives.



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# The dangers of mowing too low

Spring marks the return of many things. Trees and flowers begin to bloom again in spring, while warmer temperatures are welcomed back with open arms. Grass also begins to grow again in the spring. That means it's not too long before homeowners have to dust off their lawn mowers and get to work. Those who don't necessarily enjoy mowing the lawn may be tempted to cut their grass very low, as doing so can mean longer intervals between mowing sessions. However, mowing grass too low can have a very adverse effect on a lawn.

Cutting too low can injure the grass. Cutting grass too low can injure the grass, creating what's essentially a domino effect of problems to come. Injured grass will focus on its recovery efforts, thereby making it vulnerable to other issues.

Cutting too low promotes weed growth. Injured grass is vulnerable to invaders, including weeds and insects. Weeds

and insects can attack grass as it recovers from injury, and before homeowners know it, their lawns are overcome with a host of problems.

Cutting too low allows crabgrass to thrive. Crabgrass needs ample sunlight to grow. By cutting grass too low, homeowners may unknowingly be promoting crabgrass growth. Crabgrass is unsightly and can rob surrounding grass of the moisture it needs to grow. So lawns cut too low may not only lose their lush appeal thanks to the unattractive appearance of crabgrass, but also because areas surrounding the crabgrass patches might turn brown due to lack of water.

Cutting too low can stress the grass. Cutting too low also makes lawns vulnerable to summer heat. Without blades tall enough to block some of the summer sun, grass can quickly succumb to summer heat, leading to dried out, discolored lawns.

## VEGETABLE PLANTS TO NEVER PLANT SIDE-BY-SIDE

It's the beginning of the season when we start thinking about our gardens and what variety of vegetables we'll be planting. Whether you're a seasoned gardener or if this is your first year planting a vegetable garden, you've decided to get outside and get your hands dirty. Congratulations! You'll want to do everything you can to ensure your garden is a success.

The principle of companion planting ensures that the plants you grow together will help one another thrive in their environment. It is equally important that you consider which plants DO NOT grow well together, before you start to dig.

Plants that don't like each other may be responding to different environmental needs, could be in direct competition with one another for major resources such as sunlight, or may attract insects that severely harm the other. Determining plant compatibility can be a guess in your specific garden until you can monitor the growing habits of your plants.

There's a basic rule of thumb when it comes to planting crops near one another. First, check that the plants are of similar size and light requirements. Planting very tall plants like tomatoes next to bush beans, for example, is a bad idea because the tomatoes will likely shade out the beans. Plant shorter plants far enough away from taller plants or in a row as a border.

Plants that need a lot of water will cause chaos with nearby plants; the same as fertilizer. It's always a good idea to plant things with similar nutritional and water

needs together, unless they are fiercely competitive. Even then, you can often compensate by spacing them extra wide and providing enough fertilizer and water for both types of plants.

Lastly, are the plants that are allelopathic. These plants have the capability to chemically impede the vital systems of competing plants. Many crops have been observed leaving behind allelopathic chemicals that greatly affect the growth of their plants. Rotating broccoli can help to reduce the amount of residue it leaves behind that other plant can't tolerate.

You should never plant members of the onion family, including shallots and garlic, together with peas. It is believed that the onions can stunt the growth of the beans.

Growing tomatoes and potatoes together means trouble. They are attacked by the same blights so when planted next to one another, the diseases spread more easily.

Both asparagus and broccoli are considered heavy feeders, meaning they require a lot of nutrients and moisture. Planting them together could stunt their growth. Vegetables that do well with broccoli are aromatic herbs, radishes, and spinach. Asparagus does well alone or with herbs like dill, parsley, and basil.

Corn and tomatoes are both prone to worms and fungal blights, so an infestation in one area could spread to the other. Plant tomatoes with basil or chives to improve flavor - but avoid dill. Carrots are another good choice. Pair corn with beans and pumpkins. Read more in our blog at [www.herbeins.com](http://www.herbeins.com).



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# Small renovations that can make a big impact

Home renovations provide a host of benefits. Such projects can increase resale value and improve on the safety, aesthetics and functionality of a home.

Some homeowners may employ the mantra "go big or go home" when they embark on home improvements, thinking that only the largest renovations produce noticeable change. But that's not the case. Various smaller renovations can provide a lot of bang for homeowners' bucks as well.

• **Countertops (and hardware):** A complete kitchen overhaul may stretch some homeowners' budgets. However, changing an older countertop for a new material can provide the facelift a kitchen needs. And while changing the cabinets may be homeowners' ultimate goal, swapping hardware in dated finishes for newer handles and pulls can provide low-cost appeal.

• **Paint:** Painting a space is an inexpensive improvement that adds maximum impact. Paint can transform dark and drab rooms into bright and airy oases. Paint also can be used to create an accent wall or cozy nooks. Homeowners also can showcase their personalities with their choice of paint colors.

• **Lighting:** Homeowners should not underestimate what a change in lighting can do. When rooms or exterior spaces are illuminated, they take on entirely new looks. It's worth it to invest in new lighting, whether it's a dramatic hanging light over the dining room table or task lighting in dim spaces.

• **Weatherproofing:** Improving windows, doors, weatherstripping, and insulation in a home can offer visual appeal and help homeowners save money. The initial investment may be significant, but those costs will pay off in energy savings. According to One Main Financial, space heating is the largest energy expense the average American homeowner has, accounting for around 45 percent of all energy costs.

• **Mudroom:** Turn an entryway into a more functional space with the addition of cabinets, benches or custom-designed storage options that perfectly fit the area. Cubbies and cabinets can corral shoes, umbrellas, hats, bags, and much more.

• **Accent updates:** Any space, whether it's inside or outside a home, can get a fresh look with new decorative accents. Invest in new throw pillows and even slipcovers for living room sofas. Use new tile or paint the brick on a fireplace in a den, then update the mantel with decorative displays. Purchase wall art that can bring different colors into a room. Change the cushions on deck furniture and buy color-coordinated planters.

These subtle changes will not cost as much as full-scale renovations, but they can still help homeowners transform their homes.



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Homeowners enjoy gardening for many different reasons. In addition to adding beauty to a property, gardens can offset grocery costs by yielding tasty produce. They also offer important habitats and food sources for both insects and animals.

### 1. Start small.

You may have visions of an expansive garden growing rows of crops or acres of flowers. But it is smart to start small and build on what you find successful, which includes plants that thrive in your lawn and garden. This also is beneficial if you are unsure of vegetable yields. Several blooming plants producing bushels of crops can be overwhelming, especially if you can't get to harvesting or cooking them in a timely fashion.

### 2. Assess the soil.

Plants need nutrient-rich soil to encourage extensive root systems and produce strong, hardy plants. Nourish soil with organic matter, such as manure, compost, shredded leaves, and natural mulch. Add this organic matter in the off-season to give it enough time to be incorporated into the ground before spring. You can have your soil tested for pH and other characteristics that make it friendly or averse to plants at a local garden center.

### 3. Arm yourself with knowledge.

Do you know how deeply to plant seeds and how far apart to space plants? Are you aware of the sunlight needs of certain flowers or plants? If not, read the packaging and do your research so your plants have the best chance of not only sprouting, but also surviving. Many people prefer to start seedlings indoors in late winter and then transfer those plants outdoors when they are stronger and more established.

### 4. Use rainwater.

Rainwater contains fewer contaminants and additives than tap water, which can benefit garden plants. Collect rainwater in rain barrels and use irrigation systems to deliver it to the garden. Home gardens can yield many gifts, from flowers to fruit. Beginners can utilize some time-tested strategies to increase their chances of planting a successful garden.

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# 5 patio projects to enhance outdoor living

Warm weather paves the way to more opportunities to enjoy fresh air. For homeowners who have the luxury of outdoor spaces, including private patios, now is the time to start thinking about projects to enhance these gathering spots.

A patio can be considered a transitional area that links the outdoors to the inside of a home. According to the home and lifestyle resource The Spruce, a patio is often an oasis for lounging and entertaining. And depending on homeowners' budgets and preferences, a patio can be just as comfortable and stylish as interior spaces. The following are five patio projects that can transform these valuable spaces.

### 1. Pretty pergola

A pergola is an open-air (traditionally wood) structure that adds a measure of shade and privacy without completely blocking views of Mother Nature. Installing a pergola over the patio helps define the seating area. Hanging plants can add to the ambiance and string lights can make this a great spot to gather when the sun sets.

### 2. Patio fire pit

Build a fire pit right into the design with the same materials used to create the patio. For example, if the patio is brick or flagstone, build up to create an eye-catching fire pit. Fire pits not only look good, they also expand the time frame that the patio can be enjoyed, offering cozy spots to sit even when the weather chills.

### 3. Frame it in

Make the patio a true extension of the inside by putting up walls around three sides of the patio if it connects to the home. Leave the last open to the yard, or consider installing screens to mimic the look of popular lanais. The walls will offer more weather protection, meaning you can invest in high-quality patio furniture to make this a fully functioning outdoor living room. Hang a television that is rated for outdoor use for movie-watching under the sun or stars.

### 4. Ooh la la

Vintage bistro tables and chairs can turn a drab patio into one that calls to mind a Parisian courtyard. Whimsical lighting and accents that you would normally think to see indoors, like a gilded mirror, can add extra appeal. Soften wrought iron and other metals on the furniture by including plenty of flowers and greenery. Don't forget the candles and a place to stash a bottle of chilling wine.

### 5. Farmhouse chic

Transform a patio into an entertaining space that caters to guests. A large farmhouse style table flanked by benches and some upholstered chairs sets the scene for a dinner amid the fresh air. Watering cans filled with wildflowers and mismatched flatware establish a casual feel for gatherings in the space. For those who plan to cook and serve outside with frequency, invest in outdoor appliances so you'll never have to miss a beat with guests.

The options for transforming patios into stylish gathering spots is only limited by the imagination.

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## Did you know?

Though plants might not seem like the first thing individuals think of when they ponder long-term investments, perennials can be just that. The home and garden experts at HGTV note that some perennials can live for a very long time. For example, according to HGTV, the colorful flowering plant peony, despite a blooming season that usually lasts just seven to 10 days, has been known to survive for 70 to 100 years. Hostas are another popular perennial because they require little maintenance, and that extra free time can add up over the course of the hosta's life, which can exceed 15 years. Long-living perennials are not



necessarily unusual, but gardeners should know that many perennials, and particularly those characterized as "short-lived," tend to live around three years.



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# Revitalize your landscape on a budget

Many homeowners think they have to spend tons of green to get green in their landscape, but that isn't necessarily so. Homeowners can improve their landscapes without digging themselves into financial holes. These strategies can help anyone save some cash and still end up with attractive gardens and more.

- **Use stones or gravel for a walkway.** If commercially installed pavers or cement walkways are not within your budget, there are some affordable alternatives. Flagstone or individually purchased and spaced pavers and pea gravel can be used to create pathways. Some construction sites even offer free stones when asked. Soften the look with moss or other plants on the perimeter.

- **Remove some lawn.** Lawns can require hours of upkeep that may involve the application of expensive fertilizers and weed-killing products that are not always so eco-friendly. Reduce the size of a lawn by putting in a mixed planting bed of perennials or ornamental grasses, or use landscape fabric and mulch.

- **Look for free mulch.** Municipal recycling centers may offer residents access to free mulch made from grinding up leaves, branches and other plant debris collected throughout the town. Simply bring a few containers to the recycling center and spread the mulch for an ornamental look or to insulate landscapes over winter and protect against weeds.

- **Repurpose old items into planters.** Old wheelbarrows, barrels, watering cans, and other items can be repurposed into container gardening vessels. Figure out if items marked for



the garbage bin can be incorporated into garden features instead.

- **Invest in plants that are easy to propagate.** Perennials are the gardener's friend when it comes to saving money. These plants sprout anew each year, and many, such as sedum, catmint, ferns, hostas, and black-eyed Susans, can propagate by division. Figure out the best times of year to divide the plants and start growing them in individual containers before planting the sturdy new shoots in the ground. A single variety of plants grouped together in mass plantings is affordable and easy.

- **Shop end-of season sales.** Garden centers may begin to make room for holiday items come the fall. Take advantage of reduced costs

on remaining plants and landscape accessories during this time of year. Plants can be covered or allowed to thrive indoors until they can be planted in the spring.

- **Pool your resources.** Homeowners planning on a big landscaping or revitalization project may want to speak with neighbors to see if they're interested in doing the same. Contractors guaranteed business from a few homes in the same neighborhood may be willing to negotiate lower prices for the volume of work on things like driveway repaving, deck- or fence-building, or installation of paver patios.

Some handy ideas can help homeowners transform landscapes without spending too much.

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# What to know about landscape lighting

Home improvement trends come and go, and one trend that has become wildly popular in recent years is recognizable in yards every night. Landscape lighting has transformed how people see and enjoy their properties at night, making it one of the more sought-after upgrades among modern homeowners.

Curb appeal is often

seen through the lens of how homes appear during daylight hours, but landscape lighting can make homes look better and more modern, and potentially safer, after the sun goes down. With such potential, landscape lighting is worth exploring for homeowners looking to upgrade their properties.

Are there differ-

ent types of landscape lighting?

When considering landscape lighting, homeowners should know that there are various options to consider. According to the lighting experts at Lumens, spotlights project a concentrated and narrow beam of light that's usually around 45 degrees. Spotlights are often chosen

to highlight specific features on a property, like a component of the landscaping. Individuals who want to cast light over wider, more general areas may consider floodlights, which Lumens notes spread light up to 120 degrees.

Inground lighting is among the more sophisticated landscape lighting options. Lumens notes that inground lighting illuminates the whole of a tree or structure, often creating a dramatic look. These circle-shaped lights also are great at illuminating walkways and driveways.

Post lights are another outdoor lighting option, and these are often used to light up long walkways and pathways so it's easier and safer to navigate dark areas at night.

**Is landscape lighting a job a DIYer can handle?**

Many homeowners consider a do-it-yourself approach when pondering a potential home ren-



ovation, and a landscape lighting project is likely to inspire such curiosity as well. The home experts at HGTV note that the feasibility of DIY in regard to a landscape lighting project depends on the type of lighting homeowners want to install and where they want to install it. Replacing an existing electrical fixture may be well within the skill of a seasoned DIYer, but installing a new fixture is a job best left to the professionals. Homeowners whose

homes currently have no or very little landscape lighting are almost certainly better off working with a professional. Solar lighting that does not require any electrical work can be installed quickly and easily by anyone, but such options may not provide the look homeowners are aiming for.

**How much lighting is necessary?**

The amount of lighting homeowners want to install is up to them. If the home currently has little or no landscape lighting, a consultation with a professional can help to determine how much lighting to install and where to install it. When discussing landscape lighting, homeowners may want to inquire about dimmers. Dimmers can increase or decrease lighting depending on the situation. For example, homeowners may want a little extra light during a party, but less when relaxing alone outside at night. Dimmers allow homeowners to adjust as necessary.

Landscape lighting is a popular home renovation trend. Homeowners considering adding landscape lighting to their property are urged to work with a skilled professional to devise and install a set-up that makes their homes more appealing at night.



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## 3 potentially low-maintenance trees to consider for your property

Few things in nature are as breathtaking as a beautiful landscape. That beauty is perhaps one reason why many homeowners spend so much time and expend so much effort on their lawns and gardens.

Though plenty of homeowners love spending time in the yard, others may not be so inclined. For the latter group, low-maintenance trees can be just what the doctor ordered. Low-maintenance trees can provide the beauty nature-loving homeowners desire without all the extra work of more needy plants. It's always best to consult a local landscaping professional prior to planting to ensure a tree will thrive in a given climate. In preparation for that consultation, homeowners can study this list of three low-maintenance trees while recognizing that all trees may need a little extra TLC in extreme weather.

1. **Jacaranda:** Instantly identifiable by its purple blooms, the jacaranda tree is native to South America, which makes it ideal in warm climates. The jacaranda tree is considered a shade tree and if or when it sheds its leaves, those leaves can typically be mowed, saving homeowners the work of raking them. However, the online home and garden resource The Spruce notes that jacaranda trees can require substantial maintenance when planted near surfaces where people walk, such as driveways and patios. So when planting jacaranda trees, it's ideal to do so in locations where falling leaves will land exclusively on grass.

2. **American arborvitae:** The Arbor Day Foundation® notes



that the American arborvitae requires almost no care when it's used as a hedge or a screen. That's a popular use for this versatile specimen with a narrow, pyramid shape. Though it does not provide the bright blast of color offered by the jacaranda, the American arborvitae creates an elegant look that offers considerable privacy as well.

3. **Japanese red maple:** The Home Depot notes that the Japanese red maple are very low-maintenance trees that can adapt to various soil types and grow in an assortment of light conditions. During dry periods, however, the ADF notes the importance of keeping soil consistently moist. Various types of soil can accommodate the Japanese red maple, so

this is a consideration for any homeowner looking to add some color to their lawns without a lot of extra work.

When consider new trees for a property, homeowners can easily be persuaded by the beauty of the tree. Though that's worthy of consideration, homeowners who want low-maintenance trees should speak to a gardening professional about the work required to maintain a tree's beauty throughout the year, especially during periods of drought or other adverse conditions. In addition, ask the gardening pro to recommend non-invasive trees. Planting invasive trees can be harmful and cause damage to surrounding plants, which can be costly and time-consuming to address.

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# How to prepare soil for spring planting

Spring is a season of rejuvenation, and perhaps nowhere is that rebirth more noticeable than in the yard. Each spring, grass begins to grow again as inviting landscapes beckon people outdoors.

Extra sunlight and rising temperatures make spring a great time to plant flowers, grasses and trees. To ensure successful planting, homeowners must take steps to prepare the soil. Healthy soil can provide the ideal conditions for roots to take hold, helping plants establish themselves before potentially harsh summer conditions arrive. Preparing soil might seem like an extensive job, but a simple approach may be all that's necessary to create conditions that promote plant growth this spring.

• **Clean up the previous months' mess.** Whether homeowners live in regions marked by year-round warmth or places where winter typically features heavy snowfall, it's a good idea to clean up an area prior to spring planting. Fallen leaves, rocks, grass clippings, and other debris can contribute to compacted soil that makes it hard for plants to establish strong, healthy root systems. Clear away any debris prior to planting before taking the next step in your soil preparation routine.

• **Loosen the soil.** Once debris has been cleared away, loosen the soil. Depending on the size of the area where you'll be planting, you may need to invest in tools like a shovel, spade, spading fork, and/

or a lawn edger. If you're planting in a small area, such as a deck planter box that still has soil from last year's planting inside it, you can either clean the box and replace the soil entirely or dig around with a handheld trowel, cultivator and/or weeder. It's important to loosen all of the soil around where you will ultimately plant prior to planting to ensure water can reach the roots and help them establish themselves once planting is completed.

• **Test and, if necessary, amend the soil.** A simple pH test can help determine the acidity or alkalinity of the soil. This is an important step as soil that is too acidic or alkaline can decrease the availability of nutrients the plants will need to thrive. In addition to conducting a pH test, which can be purchased at little cost at a local home improvement store, homeowners can contact their local Cooperative Extension Service to test their soil quality. These tests will reveal soil pH, but also can shed light on the texture of the soil and other components. Once the test is conducted, the local Coop Extension Service may recommend amendments to improve the nutritional quality of the soil so new plants can thrive.

Soil conditions go a long way toward determining if new plants will thrive. Preparing the soil prior to spring planting can ensure a successful season.



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# DIY projects that can conserve energy around the house

Home renovation projects can pay numerous dividends. Renovations can have a positive effect on resale value, make homes more livable for residents and, in some ways, make homes more affordable.

Renovation projects that aim to conserve energy can save homeowners substantial amounts of money. Such projects don't often require considerable effort or even sizable financial investments, which can make homeowners skeptical as to just how much they can save after completing the project. But the scale of a project may have little to do with how much homeowners will save. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy notes that a relatively effortless task like turning back a thermostat between 7° and 10° F for eight hours per day can save homeowners as much as \$83 per year. A more labor-intensive task like planting shade trees saves homeowners an average of between \$35 and \$119 per year.

When looking for ways to conserve energy around the house and save money, homeowners need not necessarily commit to expensive projects. The DOE notes that the following are some energy-saving projects and details what homeowners

can expect to save after completing them. While each individual project may not result in jaw-dropping savings, homeowners who follow many of these recommendations may end up saving more than \$1,000 per year.

## **Project: Install exterior low-e storm windows.**

What is it? Low-e windows reflect infrared heat back into a home. Such windows are coated with an ultra-thin layer of metal that improves the window's insulation ability.

How much can I save? Homeowners who install low-e windows can save between 12 and 33 percent on their annual heating and cooling costs.

## **Project: Seal uncontrolled air leaks.**

What is it? Air leaks let cool air in during winter and warm air in during summer. Caulking, sealing and weather stripping all cracks and large openings can cut back on air leaks that are costing you money. The DOE recommends hiring a contractor to seal any leaks on heating and cooling ducts.

How much can I save? Homeowners who seal uncontrolled air leaks can save between 10 and 20 percent on their annual heating and cooling

bills.

## **Project: Plant shade trees.**

What is it? If you plant a deciduous tree between six and eight feet tall near your home, it will begin to shade your windows within a year of being planted. Depending on the species of the tree and the home, the shade tree will begin shading the roof within five to 10 years. The DOE notes that shading is the most cost-effective way to reduce air conditioning costs.

How much can I save? Properly planted shade trees can reduce air conditioning costs by anywhere from 15 to 50 percent.

## **Project: Insulate the water heater tank**

What is it? New water tanks are likely already insulated. But homeowners with older hot water tanks can insulate their tanks with a water heater insulating blanket kit.

How much can I save? Insulating a water heater tank can save homeowners as much as 16 percent on their annual water heating bills.

Even the smallest DIY projects can produce big savings. More information about energy-saving home improvement projects can be found at [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov).

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The main store is the oldest business on MacArthur Road and is now owned by Doreen Cantalini and Todd George, great-granddaughter and great-grandson of Allen Kleckner. The Emmaus store has been serving the community since 1980 and is open 6 days a week.

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# The benefits of planting native species

Spring and summer present ideal growing conditions for many plants, making these seasons an ideal time to tend to lawns and gardens. Though it's easy to succumb to the temptation of exotic plants, avid gardeners and eco-conscious planters recognize the significance of native plants.

Novices may not realize that native plants are much better for a landscape and the local ecosystem it calls home. Recognition of the many benefits of native plants can make for healthier lawns and gardens and a healthier planet as well.

## • Native plants are built for local climates.

One of the issues gardeners who plant exotic plants run into is keeping those plants thriving when weather turns harsh. For example, exotic plants may require extra watering in areas that experience drought or even long periods without precipitation in spring and notably summer. The United States Environmental Protection Agency reports that at least 40 states anticipate water shortages by 2024. Planting native plants can help to combat those shortages by reducing the need to water plants if conditions become dry in late spring and summer.

## • Native plants save money.

It's also important to note that native plants save homeowners money. Because they're capable of thriving in local conditions, native plants tend to require less watering, which can help homeowners reduce their utility costs. But native plants also require less upkeep, which means homeowners can save on potentially costly, not to mention eco-unfriendly, pesticides and other amendments in order to maintain the look of exotic plants. And though it's not always the case, exotic plants tend to cost more at



nurseries than natives.

## • Native plants save gardeners time.

In addition to saving money, native plants don't require as much attention. Though spring and summer is a great time to be in the yard, it's also a great time to be out and about. Because native plants thrive in local conditions, gardeners won't need to spend much of their free time tending to them. Exotics tend to require a lot of extra attention and effort, especially when conditions become harsh. Spending more time outdoors in harsh weather does not appeal to most gardeners.

## • Native plants blend

## in with an existing landscape.

Native plants look natural within an existing landscape, adding some instant aesthetic appeal without breaking the bank. When planting exotics, homeowners may feel a need to redesign their entire gardens to create a certain look (think Japanese garden). That can quickly consume a budget and take up a lot of free time in both the short- and long-term.

Planting season marks a great time to revitalize a landscape. Choosing native plants when doing so pays numerous dividends for homeowners and the planet they call home.



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# Quick and easy ways to give your kitchen a new look

Kitchens are often described as the busiest rooms in a home. Kitchens are where meals are prepared and tend to be go-to gathering spots on holiday get-togethers and during other events when homeowners host family and friends.

With so much time spent in the kitchen, it's easy to see how homeowners might grow a little bored by these rooms. The cost of a kitchen remodel won't be cheap, as the home improvement resource Angi.com notes that the typical cost of such a project in the United States is between \$13,000 and \$38,000. Angi.com estimates even indicate that a high-end remodel could cost homeowners as much as \$61,000. That's beyond many homeowners' budgets. But the good news is that there are many quick and easy, not to mention less expensive, ways to give a kitchen a new look.

• **Repaint and restyle the cabinets.** Cabinet space is an undeniably precious commodity in a kitchen, especially as more and more homeowners embrace their inner chef and cook more complicated meals at home. After all, the more expansive a home chef's culinary repertoire, the more space that person needs to store all the tools of the cooking trade. A full cabinet replacement is unnecessary if the cabinets are still functional and not overcrowded, so repainting them can be a great way to give the kitchen a new look while keeping costs reasonable. During the painting project, homeowners can install

new cabinet knobs and/or drawer pulls to freshen up the style of the cabinets even further.

• **Install under-cabinet lighting.** Another inexpensive way to give a kitchen a new look is to install under-cabinet lighting. Under-cabinet lighting serves both an aesthetic and practical purpose. From a purely aesthetic standpoint, under-cabinet lighting can make a kitchen feel more warm and keep the kitchen illuminated when meals aren't being prepared and homeowners don't want to have their overhead lights on but still want to be able to navigate the kitchen safely. During meal prep, under-cabinet lighting can illuminate counters so it's easier to chop, peel and perform other prep tasks.

• **Replace existing backsplash.** Replacing backsplash is another simple, inexpensive and effective way to give a kitchen a new feel. Homeowners can opt for something neutral that won't upset their existing decor or go with a more bold backsplash that immediately draws the attention of anyone who enters the room. This simple job can be done by the average do-it-yourselfer and the cost of new backsplash won't break the bank.

• **Replace existing seating.** Whether you have an island countertop with bar stools or a breakfast nook with cushioned seats, replacing the seating is a budget-friendly job that can create a new look when entering the room. Countertop bar stools come in many styles, so giving this area of the kitchen a



new feel can be as simple as shifting from classic, high-back stools to more modern swivel stools with a chrome base. For the breakfast nook, replacing a light-colored bench cushion with a bolder alternative can instantly transform the look of the space.

Kitchen remodels can break the bank. But there's a host of budget-friendly ways for cost-conscious homeowners to revitalize these popular spaces in their homes.



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